

Making up for lost time by bloodamber

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Summary: When the kids realize Eleven has never had a birthday party they get everyone on board to plan something that she will never forget. A tooth-rotting indulgence fic, set post season 2 (because I really needed to write something happy after that S3 finale...)

Making up for lost time

The kids had all gathered in the Wheeler's basement for their usual Saturday games night.

The kitchen had been raided for snacks by an ever eager Dustin, and Mike had almost finished setting up the board with the help of Will. Lucas and Max were lounging on the couch nearby, holding hands and looking sickening coupley in an awkward prepubescent kind of way. Jane, or El as she still preferred to be called, was lingering around the table, watching intently as Mike set up his space for the dungeon master while Will carefully placed all the small figurines and dice on the table.

At the call from Mike, they all crowded around the table, a small elbow fight breaking out between Dustin and Lucas before Mike called order.

"Okay, before we begin tonight's game does anyone have any party information to share with the group?"

"Oh, me!" Dustin eagerly jumped up. "Well as you guys know it's my birthday coming up and my mom said she would take us all to play paintball. It's gonna be wicked."

"No way man, that will be so *tubular*!" Lucas got an elbow in the ribs and rolled eyes from Max at his continued use of such a lame expression.

"I've gone paintballing before." Max piped up, "it was really fun. But the bullets hurt, I was bruised for ages afterward."

"What is a little pain?" Dustin declared dramatically, "I laugh in the face of pain— Ow!" He clutched his shin where Lucas had just kicked him.

"That didn't sound like a laugh." Lucas taunted and got a kick in the leg in return, they started grappling and the rest of the kids leaned away from the flying limbs. After a few minutes, Dustin and Lucas rejoined the table, clothes a little askew but friendship still intact.

In the silence, Eleven leaned towards Mike and asked him quietly, "what is a... birthday party?" The whole group, having heard, turned to stare at her with varying degrees of shock.

"You've never had a birthday party?" Will asked her, looking a little sad at the thought, and El shook her head.

"It's only one of the best things ever!" Dustin jumped back to his feet, arms waving excitedly babbling about all the cool things you could do on your birthday.

"Well, you know about birthdays, right?" Mike asked her over the sound of Dustin's voice.

Eleven nodded, "Yes. Hopper told me I am one-three years old."

"Yeah, you're *thirteen* years old, like we all are. When it is our birthday we have parties to celebrate, with friends and junk food and stuff."

"It's like what we are doing now, but all about you and there is cake with candles that you blow out and presents," Lucas added.

"Yeah, you would love it El." Mike smiled at the way her eyes lit up at the idea.

"We should have a birthday party for El tomorrow." Dustin proposed, enthusiastic at the thought. "I'm gonna go ask Steve right now if he can help us plan it." He scrambled off before anyone could get a word in knowing Steve would have plenty of cool ideas and more importantly, plenty of money to do them with.

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Upstairs, Steve was watching TV, acting as baby sister while the rest of the Wheelers were out. It had become a common occurrence for him to look after the gang of kids after everything that had happened a few months earlier. He knew he should feel pathetic for spending his Friday nights - nights when he had usually been partying it up with half the school - to watch a group of snot-nosed kids but instead, he found their youthful exuberance uplifting after all the shit they had been through.

His social life had already taken a drastic downturn since his fight with Tommy H. and his continued association with Nancy, and Jonathan 'the freak' Byers, but he found himself caring less and less what the rest of Hawkins' High thought of him. It was a refreshing change from his previous persona of 'King Steve'. Now he was just plain ole' Steve, babysitter extraordinaire to a bunch of rag-tag middle schoolers.

Lost in thought as he was, the sudden appearance of Dustin made him jump and let out a less than manly squeak of surprise. The kid didn't seem to care, barely catching his breath before excitedly talking at a speed that Steve found himself struggling to keep up with. It was only the fact that the kid was near vibrating with excitement that he didn't leap into action assuming some supernatural crisis.

"Woah! Dustin, slow down so I can actually understand you." Dustin rolled his eyes but complied, speaking at a ridiculously slow pace before excitement had the words spilling out again.

"We just found out that Eleven has never had a birthday party before. Like *ever*! We all think it would be awesome to have one tomorrow with cake and presents and stuff. Can you help us please please *please*."

"Are you sure this isn't just an excuse to eat cake?"

Dustin looked slightly sheepish.

"Nooo... well, maybe, but don't you think it's sad that El has never had a party? This would mean so much to her and as her friends we are obligated to make her happy. Don't you want to make her happy?" Dustin gave him an expectant look knowing the argument was already won.

"Hey, I didn't say I wouldn't help. Just give me a second to think." He pushed his hands through his hair, wondering why he had so easily caved to the younger boy's demands. He really had gone soft! And he also had no clue how to help plan a thirteen-year-old girl's party.

"So, did you actually have a plan past 'birthday party' and 'cake'?"

"Not really, why do you think I'm talking to you?"

"Right... okay, well I guess we better check with Hopper that it's okay - since he is her guardian and everything now." Dustin nodded and ran off to grab the phone returning to press it into Steve's hands.

Steve was going to punch in the number when he realized it had already been ringing and a tinny voice issued from the earpiece.

"Hello? This is Hopper." Steve glared at Dustin for throwing him into this with no time to plan what he was going to say. He quickly lifted the phone to his ear.

"Hey Hopper, it's Steve. You told me to call if--"

"What's wrong? Is El okay? Give me a few minutes and I can--"

"Nothing is wrong, sir!" Steve interrupted before the chief of police could work himself into more of a panic. "I just needed to ask you something, on behalf of the kids."

There was a pause, then, *"okay. I'm listening."* Hopper's voice indicated that if it was a call to waste his time on stupid questions there would be hell to pay. So Steve explained what Dustin had pitched to him minutes earlier, reassuring the man that he didn't mind helping out financially with some of the stuff or playing chauffeur.

Despite the grumbling that issued initially Steve could tell the man was sold on the idea. He had seen Hopper and Eleven interact enough to know the man doted on her like the daughter she now legally was. Throwing the kid that had been deprived of a normal childhood something as simple as a birthday party was an easy pitch and within minutes he had Hopper's approval and a basic plan of attack.

Steven hung up the phone and turned to Dustin, giving him a thumbs up laughing when the boy did a spontaneous dance on the spot.

"You're the *best!*" Dustin yelled, launching himself at Steve for a hug before the excitable boy scrambled back downstairs to share the news with the rest of the group. Steve was left a little shell shocked, but with a warm feeling in his chest at making the kid so happy with something as simple as a phone call and a promise to help.

Hopper hung up on the Harrington kid, feeling a little overwhelmed. It had been a while since he had been a dad to a little girl and he was scared of screwing everything up. He had never even considered birthdays. His own one was something he never bothered to celebrate anymore - not after losing his family. There was never a reason to celebrate so he didn't and left him very much out of depth when he considered planning someone else's.

Harrington had offered to help and he was sure he could keep the kids entertained, for at least some of the day but there was a lot more he still needed help with. There was only one person he could turn to, so dialing the Byers household he gave Joyce the rundown of the situation, getting her on board within the first few seconds.

The following day dawned bright and early. At least for one particular town sheriff. The clock hadn't even hit 8 am before he was being pestered by El to wake up.

She had discovered the fastest way to wake him up was to pull his pillow from under his head and the covers off his bed with her abilities. It afforded her a quick getaway when he got up to chase her and by that time she had successfully gotten him out of bed.

"Alright, I'm up!" He grumbling good-naturedly when his covers disappeared and his head thumped down onto the mattress, groggily following the sound of El's laughter into the main living space.

"Sooo, who wants Eggo's for breakfast?" Her grin was all the answer he needed. He pulled the yellow box out of the freezer and set it on the table in front of Jane who pulled it closer eagerly. He chuckled as she set about devouring the sweet treats, ruffling her hair on his way to brew coffee.

An hour later, with both of them fed and dressed, Hopper dropped her off to the arcade, reminding her to wear the wig and sunglasses he had given her at all times. She rolled her eyes but obligingly put on the glasses and adjusted her wig before jumping out of the car. He watched her run towards the entrance of the arcade where Mike,

Dustin, and Will were already waiting. Steve stood off to the side and when their gazes met Steve gave him a cheeky salute. Hopper grinned privately to himself as he pulled away from the curb, knowing El was in good hands.

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The morning went by quickly and Steve had to remind himself to keep an eye on the time, having promised to have all the kids out by lunchtime and over at the Byers for the proper celebration.

However, he did manage to surprise the kids with his skills at Pac Man, having spent a fair bit of his own time and money at the arcade when he was younger perfecting his skills. After making his way onto the high score board he spent the rest of the time watching his quarters disappear into countless machines until it was time to leave.

Ushering a reluctant Dustin away from Dragon Quest he used the magic words 'there will be cake' and promises to bring him back again during the week after school.

Jonathan was waiting outside in his car to take half of the group of kids, Will and Mike peeled off with Eleven to go with Jonathan while Lucas and Max got into the back seat of Steve's ride, Dustin having already claimed the front seat. The drive was short and soon they were pulling up outside the newly renovated Byers household. The kids exited both cars in an excited rush to get inside and they all jammed into the entranceway before stopping to look around in awe.

Joyce Byers had outdone herself. As soon as she had heard the idea of throwing Eleven a birthday party she had offered her own home and worked late into the night to transform the interior into something fun and magical, wanting the young girl to have the best first birthday party imaginable. She had forgone any sort of fairy lights, not wanting to trigger any painful memories of the upside-down for any of them but that hadn't stopped her from going crazy with the rest of the decorations.

The entire house had ended up as a color explosion, streamers, and balloons of all colors hanging down from the ceiling. On the large wall behind the couch was a massive sign spelling out *Happy Birthday*

El in gold lettering.

All eyes were on Eleven as she took a tentative step forward into the balloon strewn floor. Picking up a light blue one she held it carefully between her hands like it was made of glass. A few seconds later the moment was broken when Dustin jumped into the pile, managing to pop one of the balloons underfoot.

After that everything became chaos when the rest of the kids jumped into action and started whacking each other with balloons. El stood frozen for a few seconds as chaos unfolded around her before Mike hit her over the head with a red balloon.

There was a pause in the fighting as all the kids turned to see what El might do in retaliation. When a trickle of blood started dripping from one nostril they all leaned away but no one escaped from the balloons that had risen into the air and where now attacking them from all directions.

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Unnoticed, Hopper stood with Joyce in the entrance to the kitchen watching the chaos unfold.

"Thank you, I could have never put together anything without your help," Hopper said, smiling down at Joyce.

"It was my pleasure. That girl has been through a lot and she deserves a bit of joy in her life. They all do." Joyce was looking at Will as she spoke, watching the way he was smiling and looking so carefree as he chased Jonathan around the room with two balloons in hand. She was glad that he could still be that little boy she had raised after all the horror he had to endure.

Only once the balloons had nearly all been popped did Steve interrupt the fun, yelling out from the doorway where he sought refuge with the adults.

"All right shit heads, it's cake time!" Steve got a stern look from Hopper for his choice in language but the kids all cheered and crowded around the table in the other room which was covered in

party food and holding the most impressive layered chocolate cake covered with pink icing and with thirteen candles burning merrily on top.

Jane was directed to stand in front of it by Mike who stayed at her side while the rest of the kids crowded around. All at once they started singing, lead by Joyce while Jonathan snapped some photos.

"-happy birthday dear *Eleven*, happy birthday to you!" Everyone ended the song with a round of clapping and cheering, Mike encouraging the birthday girl to blow out the candles and make a wish. Eleven closed her eyes tightly in concentration for a few long seconds before blowing out the candles in one go. Once the second round of cheering was done Joyce expertly cut up the cake and distributed the pieces to everyone.

They all fell silent as they enjoyed the cake, El's eyes lighting up with joy at the first taste before wolfing it down and quickly asking for more.

Once the sugar kicked in, the children were ushered outside to play, with Steve joining in the games at Dustin's insistence. Jonathan managed to sneak in a few pictures of the games, paying particular attention to the moments Steve was tackled to the ground by the small horde of children.

As the sun started to dip lower in the sky, Hopper called them back in and they discovered that Joyce, Jonathan, and Nancy had cooked them up a feast. There was a mad scramble for the food and cutlery, all manners thrown to the wayside as they devoured the food put in front of them until they were too stuffed to eat another bite.

But the day wasn't over and Mike grabbed El's hand, tugging her into the living room.

"What?" El asked, confused when everyone else jumped up to follow them.

"We haven't had the best part yet!" Stepping into the living room, Mke indicated the pile of brightly colored packages Joyce had helped to wrap on the coffee table, "Presents!"

Jonathan was fast enough to capture her stunned expression as she looked at all the packages.

"Mine?" She looked around, meeting Hopper's gaze as though she was asking for permission.

"Yeah El, those are all yours." He reassured, fighting back the familiar flare of anger he felt anytime he thought of the asshole scientists who had deprived El of so much.

"Come on, let's open them!" Mike tugged her over to the couch and got her to sit in front of them while the rest of the kids piled around her offering suggestions at which one she should open first.

El ended up going for the smallest package first, tentatively taking it from the pile and looking around at everyone as though confirming again that she was actually allowed.

At the encouraging smiles of others, she carefully peeled off the paper to reveal a set of hair clips and hair ties in a wide variety of colors.

"I thought you might need some of those soon, with how quickly your hair is growing out," Joyce spoke up and El raised a hand to touch the curly mop of hair on her head.

"Do you want to try one of the clips?" Mike asked and at a nod from El, he took one of the bright blue butterfly clips and slid it into her hair. Once he deemed it properly positioned did he realize how close he had gotten to El.

"Get a room you two!" Lucas teased, making the rest of the kids snicker while Mike turned bright red and El frowned in confusion.

Eager to create a distraction Mike grabbed the biggest package on the table and thrust it into El's lap.

"Here, open this one next! It's from all of us." He indicated the party and they all leaned forward in anticipation.

This time she tore into the paper, unveiling the brand new Realistic TRC-214 radio handset she had been given.

"Now you can have your own radio to keep in touch with all of us!"

"And this one is the newest model! It has a much better range than ours!" Dustin excitedly started gushing about all the new features until Lucas threw a cushion at him to shut him up, which Dustin immediately threw back. Lucas ducked and it hit Max in the face, whose expression promised deadly retribution.

Dustin scrambled to his feet and backed away but Max was faster and managed to return the favor. Lucas eagerly grabbed another cushion wanting in in the action but at Hopper's stern look they all settled down again.

The rest of the presents were opened quickly, El getting into the act of tearing the paper off at the encouragement of everyone. In the end, the whole lounge was strewn with pieces of paper and El looked over all her new presents, touching them reverently. In front of her had in front of her a new dress and shirt with bright neon shapes over it, a sketch pad and pack of colored pencils, her hair clips, a new wooly hat, and most importantly a large assortment of candy.

Her eyes lit up at the promise of more sweets and Hopper had to take the candy away before she decided to tear into the bags.

"I think it's best we saved these for later. Besides, there is one more present you have yet to open." At El's curious look Hopper nodded in the direction of the front door and she jumped up with the rest of the party to race outside.

Bursting out the door they saw the final surprise of the day. Sitting proudly in the driveway was a new bike, with a red ribbon tied around the handlebars. El walked up to it and softly stroked the handlebars as though hardly believing her eyes.

"Now you don't have to ride on the back of our bikes when we go places," Mike said into the silence, excited at the prospect of El being let out more to go on adventures with them.

"But... I don't know how to ride." El said with a frown.

"That's okay kiddo, I'll teach you." Hopper ruffled her hair, cherishing

the excited look she gave him.

"We can all teach you!" Will shyly added and the rest of the party nodded their agreement.

Once El had finished admiring her bike they went back indoors to watch a movie that Steve had rented for them. Snuggling down on the ground with blankets and pillows they started to watch the adventures of *The Last Starfighter* until eyelids began to droop and they all succumbed to sleep.

Not even Steve was immune, having been wrangled into the puppy pile of kids by Dustin, and was now lightly snoring with Dustin draped over his lap.

Nancy and Jonathan had retreated to his bedroom to have some quiet time for themselves and it was just Hopper and Joyce in the kitchen, drinking the leftover cocoa Joyce had made for everyone.

"Joyce, I- I wanted to thank you. For putting this whole thing together. To see El happy like that, it- I-" Hopper was at a loss for words, unable to fully articulate how much the strange little girl he had met a year earlier had come to mean to him.

"It was my pleasure Hop" Joyce placed a hand on his. "God knows she deserves a bit of fun and spoiling after everything she has been through. They all do."

Hopper could only nod, he still struggled with the memories of what they went through and could only imagine how traumatic it must have been for the kids who had befriended El.

"But I can't take all the credit," Joyce added, "the kids had the idea first and Steve helped a lot. He bought most of the snacks and chipped in on the presents." They both glanced over to see him surrounded on all sides by sleeping children, dead asleep himself.

"I will have to thank him later."

They were silent a moment until Joyce asked cheekily, "So how are you going to top this next year?"

"Next year. " Hopper repeated blankly.

"Yeah, you know how pesky birthdays are. They come along *every year*." Joyce let out a laugh at his expression, patting his arm.

"Jesus Joyce," Hopper slumped in his seat in exhaustion, "I'm planning to not think about any more parties for at least another 364 days."

"Don't worry, I'm sure we could get the kids on board to plan something for her again. And you know I'll always be happy to help."

Hopper nodded, taking a sip from his mug and rubbing a weary hand over his face at the prospect of more parties. But one look at El, surrounded by friends and her new presents he knew he would plan a thousand parties for her if that was what it took to keep her happy. However, right now he was going to bask in the feeling of a job well done.